

Public Hearing – March 8, 2022  
Veterans' Affairs Committee

Testimony Submitted by Commissioner Katie Dykes

**Senate Bill No. 336 – AN ACT EXEMPTING VETERANS FROM THE PASSPORT TO THE PARKS MOTOR VEHICLE REGISTRATION PROGRAM FEE.**

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony regarding **Senate Bill No. 336 – An Act Exempting Veterans From The Passport To The Parks Motor Vehicle Registration Program Fee.**

The Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) **cannot support** this legislation because Connecticut's State Parks depend on the [Passport to the Parks Program](#) to finance the operation of state parks. **We estimate that exempting all veterans from the Passport to the Parks fee will result in a reduction of funding by approximately \$1 million per year.**

Passport to Parks allows residents with Connecticut registered vehicles to visit state parks without paying a daily entrance fee, making parks accessible and convenient for all to visit. The public's use of outdoor recreation areas across the state saw a record-breaking year in 2020, when residents and visitors turned to the outdoors as a reprieve during the COVID-19 pandemic. The public continued to flock to the outdoors in 2021 to take part in outdoor recreation activities, with an estimated 13 million visitors enjoying Connecticut's State Parks and Forests.

The Passport to the Parks program provides a stable, predictable funding source to support the operations of our state parks and forests. The Passport to the Parks program allowed DEEP to restore many services that had been previously reduced because of funding cuts, such as the reopening of four campgrounds that had been closed prior to the program. Connecticut state parks are currently experiencing cost pressures due to increased visitation well as rising operating costs. Decreasing the revenue source used to run state parks could cause service curtailments across the state park system.

We appreciate and applaud the efforts to honor and provide appropriate benefits for our state's veterans. DEEP currently provides a [free pass for veterans with a service-connected disability](#) to visit the Gillette Castle Museum, the Dinosaur State Park Museum, and Fort Trumbull Museum, which are currently the only state park museums that charge an entrance fee. We must oppose this bill because of the negative impact it will have on the funding that keeps state park operating and open throughout the year.

Thank you for the opportunity to offer this testimony. If you have any questions, please contact DEEP's legislative liaison Harrison Nantz at [Harrison.Nantz@ct.gov](mailto:Harrison.Nantz@ct.gov).